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## Professor dispels fear of Shakespeare

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

As lovely as the language is in Shakespeare's plays and sonnets, more than a few undergraduates shy away from a class dealing strictly with this writer of the Renaissance era.

Students need fear the Bard of Avon no more. Associate Professor of English Niels Herold, a Shakespeare and Renaissance drama specialist, examines the meaning and style of Shakespeare's canon in such a way that students not only learn and understand the plays but also become comfortable with the works and enjoy them more than they first thought possible.

"I was deathly afraid to take a Shakespeare class. But Professor Herold made Shakespeare not just bearable, but delightful," said senior education major Steve Nachteggall. "You can easily tell that he is passionate about his subject. After taking his class, I can honestly say I have gained a great appreciation for Shakespeare's genius."

Herold is aware of the trepidation many non-English majors feel about reading Shakespeare. Many students outside the major take ENG 105, a general introduction to Shakespeare's plays, which can be used to meet part of OU's general education requirements.

"There often is a lot of anxiety and resistance to studying Shakespeare at the beginning of that class," said Herold, who also teaches a 300-level course and senior and graduate seminars on Shakespeare. "It's a real challenge because some of the students are engineering majors and so forth and don't think of themselves as literary at all. I try to make the text relate across a wide range of sensibilities.

"The great thing about teaching that class is you can step back from your expertise and make relating the play the main project. And I'm still seeing things in the plays that I hadn't noticed before. There's always a possibility that my students will show me something new or a different interpretation that I hadn't previously considered."

In his winter semester section of ENG 105, Herold chose to study "Romeo and Juliet," "The Merchant of Venice," and "Hamlet." He speaks to his students colloquially to promote discussion and interactive learning while focusing on the language, phrasing and meaning of a particular passage.

"I'm very text-oriented and want my students to see what's there in the play," Herold said. "My teaching is a kind of show-and-tell exercise. You have to prove that Shakespeare is understandable if you spend enough time with it. Students are used to digesting long passages of text. But Shakespeare is poetry and it has to be read slowly and closely. You walk them through the plays and enable the text to make sense to them, and then they begin to become more comfortable."

Herold often recites passages in class, using different voice inflections to analyze the meaning of the text. Students often find new meaning in the plays even if they've already read them.

"If you have been exposed to Shakespeare prior to taking this class, Professor Herold will make you look at the plays differently," said junior psychology major Angela Bates. "He's meticulous about the breakdown of sentences. A closer look at the language can change your view of an entire scene. We examine the text in a lot of depth, and our in-class discussions allow us to hear different perspectives on the plays."

Senior biology and environmental health major Jaclyn Toepel took ENG 105 as a general education elective. Toepel had looked forward to studying Shakespeare since she was a high school freshman.

"The class really fulfilled a lot for me," Toepel said. "Professor Herold brought out things from the plays I had not thought of before. We talked a lot about Shakespeare's life and background, and Professor Herold integrated several interesting things about Shakespeare into our discussions, which also helped us to understand the plays. It was also fun learning about the many different phrases in daily language that came from Shakespeare."

"You can really tell Professor Herold loves what he's doing. Having a teacher who loves his subject is very refreshing no matter what the class."

Herold is teaching ENG 315, Shakespeare, during the spring 2003 semester. Visit the [Department of English](#) Web site for more information on its courses, faculty, programs and events.

**SUMMARY**

Associate Professor of English Niels Herold examines the meaning and style of Shakespeare's canon in such a way that students not only learn and understand the plays but also become comfortable with the works and enjoy them more than they first thought possible. Herold is aware of the trepidation many non-English majors feel about reading Shakespeare.

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